AIN'T I A

WOMAN?

MAY 19, 1972 25¢ VOL.2 NO.8

more thoughts on STRUCTURING

The way in which women become involved in feminist politics follows a natural progression pretty much. As we move beyond examining our personal lives and hassles, we look for ways to correct the injustices; as we find the injustices to be inherent in the political system of this country, and after spending varying amounts of energy and effort in effecting change, we recognize total change to be necessary. The work we engage in at this point of consciousness we must see within the framework of some larger strategy leading to and eventually accomplishing a revolution.

Within the larger strategy of revolution, the present structure of women's liberation has evolved ways of meeting the needs of women at the various points of consciousness and with various commitment due to time and situation. Because a great deal has been written recently suggesting new structures are needed to further our goal, we have been prompted to examine the effectiveness of the present structures in achieving that end. We began discussing this by examining the structure within which we now work and which has comprised the bulk of each of our experience within the women's movement.

The original publications cell of Iowa City WLF was organized with the purpose of publishing a newspaper, AIAW. Therefore our action was to be basically above ground, and as it turned out, resulted in a high degree of visibility in terms of local knowledge of the collective membership. These two facts--that our work is above-ground and that membership can be easily found out--should be kept in mind throughout this discussion because we have always had to work within those limitations.

The structure of the AIAW group is a politically tight collective, trying to develop theory/analysis which is reflected in the paper. We share the tasks of production and participate pretty equally in discussion and decision-making on all levels, including the ongoing process of determining our political analysis. Discipline is a prominent goal in this process, although it hasn't been fully achieved by any means.

Our structure evolved because we wanted the paper to function as effectively as possible in a public dialog that would have an effect on revolutionary and feminist thought and activity in this country. In order to do that we had to come to grips with our politics, and struggle over the changes in our thinking that happened as we worked together. Having a stable membership with basic political agreement was mandatory for this process to continue, so that is how we have worked. We found the best structural way that we could to meet the goals we have in mind.

Although we describe ourselves as "politically tight," there are still political differences among us. We feel it is imperative for a collective like ours to accept that there will be some differences of this kind, because of such political factors as varying class backgrounds, age, life styles or existing personal privilege. Other groups might have to deal with racial differences or gay/straight divisions which we aren't faced with at this point because we are all white and all gay. But despite these political differences the collective has stayed together and progressed because of a common commitment.

The strength of a tight collective should be recognizable from this fact that we have stayed together and productive for two years. Half of the present collective was in the original cell that started AIAW. To keep our political direction progressive but stable we limit the collective to women of very similar political orientations, so that we are in agreement on all basic issues we feel are important. We therefore work in a less publically controlled way than groups who have a loose turnover of members. Because of this AIAW has gradually progressed as the consciousness of the collective developed. Though it is a means to smoother change, greater commitment, and trust with each other, the very fact of limitation of collective members to similarity of politics creates problems. These are some internal problems we face within the collective and the ways we try to deal with them:

1) We have often overlooked a point of view that wasn't represented within the collective. Right now, for instance, we have no Black or third world women in the collective, no women with their own children, and no straight women; therefore, we cannot represent those points of view from our experiences alone. To combat this narrowness we listen to other women and learn from them, and try to utilize people from outside the collective as sources of first-hand experience in those areas.

2) Losing a member of such a tight collective and finding and orienting a replacement can be traumatizing to both the collective and the new member. Because of the way we work, we rely greatly on our potentials, exploring and developing not only our political analysis but practices as well. Orienting a new member creates a temporary imbalance to the division of labor and demands extra time and energy from every other collective member to encourage and explain things to a woman who is not used to working collectively. During the two years that the collective has existed we have found that we progressed most when membership was constant. Even a small turnover was, in retrospect, destructive to our ability to work well. None of these offsets the value of having a new member, of course. But it is a strain that has to be dealt with.

3) Because of our selectivity of political views, the AIAW collective is not very large, despite what our sales blurb says at times. We have a high work load on us, which magnifies the importance of working well together collectively.

Although we ascribe to an across-the-board collective ideology, we have learned the necessity to accept some inequalities in terms of the time commitments each of us is capable of. The minimum commitment is fairly high - 6 hours of meeting time each week and 9 hours during production week for each of us - but we have learned that differences beyond that must be acceptable in order for the paper to get out and our process to continue. We've found it necessary for those who have extra time to do office work and the like, and take that responsibility for those who don't have the time due to jobs or other commitments. When resentments over unequal work loads have come up (and they have) we've found talking them out the best way to deal with them.

Generally we feel we have learned to function productively within the collective, and continue to work to overcome the limitations that our chosen structure seems to have built in.

The collective exists within a community and the society at large, so there are other hassles related to our functioning in that context. Working as a tight collective, publishing AIAW, we've realized that we're 1) too visible to do much other political work (underground), 2) subject to accusations by women outside our collective for being elitist, powerful, judgemental, and cliqueish, and 3) because of that attitude we are isolated from community dialog which we feel should be going on.

Though we don't use our names in the paper, the local community knows the members of the collective. Also, the information is accessible to local liberals and police infiltrators via grapevine due to fairly lax security consciousness in the community. We have found our visibility frustrating but unalterable for now. Visibility is not, however, inherent to all collectives, but characteristic to publishing a paper.

Although we are a closed collective we have to deal with criticisms from the community because of our visibility. Unfortunately there is no real forum for criticism and explanation established here, so group-to-group or individual-to-group tensions often go unresolved or are present for a destructively long time. Situations of this sort that we are or have been in are:

1) Since we are a closed collective and have sometimes been too ready to judge others' politics, we have been called elitist. It is necessary and obvious that we believe our position on an issue is right, and we don't feel that a tolerant laissez-faire stance towards other positions is called for in this situation. What we have learned is that we must make our criticisms specific so that a sweeping negative judgement cannot be inferred when we have not intended it. If after doing that we are still called elitist then we must feel that the charge is invalid.

2) Because we are the only women's paper locally and in this region we have been resented for being powerful. Also, because we often write our ideas on subjects contained in articles by other groups that we've published, we've been accused of 'getting the last word' by our press power and being unduly critical. On this last point we have recognized such misuse of press-power and have established a policy of giving the other group a chance to edit our response to their ideas before printing time. But we have found little to do about general accusations of power because we started the paper from nothing and keep it going with very little but sweat, and what influence that has gained us for the spread of our ideas we are glad we have.

3) We have been resented for seeming to represent all women or all gay women

A REVOLUTION

Prompted and influenced by the RF-28 structure article in the last issue.

in the community, yet publishing only our opinions or selected other women's writing in the paper. This problem is mainly due to lack of clarity about the source of the paper, and to combat it we have published a definitive statement that material we publish reflects only the views of the collective.

4) In relating to the gay community or participating in other women's groups in Iowa City, we often feel that we are not accepted as ourselves, but as a representative of AIAW. Unless we are at a meeting specifically to function for the paper, our individual opinions are our own, yet we feel disagreements with our individual opinions are directed generally at AIAW. Also, disagreements with AIAW are sometimes directed at individuals in the collective as if they were solely responsible for the article in question. This tendency to generalize or individualize us wrongly is understandable because there is no avenue for criticism of the paper by individuals in the community. In our first months of publication we did set up meetings to hear our critics' views, but ended them when we were the only ones coming. To reopen such meetings now would have to be thought about because to do so would be hypocritical if we weren't open to the possibility of community control of some kind, and in many ways we don't want to be. However, there may be some middle ground for discussion which we and the community should seek out.

Although we have made small beginnings at better community relationship with our collective, we are presently fairly isolated from the community as a group. This isolation is in part unfortunate, but is also in part by design for reasons of effectiveness, saving our energy, and minimal security.

Other light political groups would not be open to much of the criticism we receive which is due solely to our publishing function. However, if a goal of a tight political collective were to take part in a critical dialog within a community or area they would have to deal early on with problems of community rapport.

Political collectives in the Women's Movement have a lot to learn from such groups as the Panthers and the Young Lords. Much of their activity is in community service programs such as breakfasts and medical clinics for the people of their communities, yet they don't allow the community to influence them to the point that their radical position is compromised, although their communities' needs influence and direct much of what they do.

Of course the Women's Movement is in a much different relationship to the women it serves than either the Panthers or Young Lords are to the people they serve, and it would be arrogant to make a direct analogy. There is no real community of women in this country as there are communities of blacks, Puerto Ricans or other oppressed cultural groups. Nevertheless the political integrity of groups like the Panthers and Lords is to be respected and many of their organizational principles can be profitably used as models for political collectives in the Women's Movement.

In our area there are many organizations that fall into a few basic structural forms. Women's centers, day care centers, free medical clinics, tenants' associations, legal rights groups, etc. fall into the category of service groups. Other basic structural forms are consciousness-raising groups, collectives, underground cells, and conferences.

The purpose and function of service groups is to provide a service to the people. Presumably there was a need in the community for such a service and an organizational structure was worked out to best meet that need. One limitation of these groups is that it is often difficult or impossible to have the organization reflect a revolutionary ideology. For instance, groups that provide a skilled service such as medical or legal have to compromise their ideology in order to kow-tow to doctors and lawyers whose skill they need. These "professionals" know they have a skill that is needed and that they therefore have power within the organization and they use it. The result is a watered-down liberal stance or no political stand at all. This causes problems within the organization. There are many different political stands within the group and its not only difficult for people of differing politics to work together, but also difficult for any structure to accommodate everyone.

However, the purpose of service groups is to meet a need in the community, so even if such a group could come up with a radical ideology and statement of purpose, political education comes second because people are attracted to these organizations initially to have a need met.

Consciousness-raising groups obviously function to raise the political consciousness of its members through discussion and sharing of personal experience. Sometimes the politics of the members don't develop beyond an understanding of the oppressiveness of their own situation i.e. middle class women if they are talking only amongst themselves without a working class woman in the group or the in-put of some class conscious articles will probably not develop an understanding of class struggle, or their own oppressiveness and privileges, or CR groups structure can help formulate politics.

It is possible for CR groups to do actions but usually only if the politics of its members are compatible--this often limits action.

Women in Iowa City turned from one large organization to a structure of small collectives because the large group was unwieldy, we couldn't talk to each other, and we couldn't get anything done. The collectives we developed centered around proposed action such as beginning a paper, a political study group, medical cell, revolutionary art cell, a daycare center, and a gay cell. These collectives served as both CR groups and a structure within which to carry out action. Within that structure AIAW and a daycare center were organized, an extensive speaking program was organized and carried out, and women taught several free university courses on women.

One function that structure never really adequately served was organizing new people. We finally concluded that one reason was that it is difficult for women who have been into WL for a long time to come regularly to new CR groups with any amount of vital energy. This analysis was borne out when the women's center was begun by a group of women who had not been involved in the earlier central organization of WLF in Iowa City, and the W.C. has finally met the need of women wanting to find out about WL.

Underground organizations are closed collectives functioning to overthrow the government. The identity of the members is unknown, their politics are consistent and they carry out action determined by their analysis of society. They are mainly a group organized to do political action; it is difficult for them to do education although the Weathermen tried to do both through their 'letters from the underground.' It is up to groups functioning above ground who have the same political ideology to explain the actions of underground groups.

Conferences function to get many different people together at one time to

--*continued from page three*

share and spread ideas. Conferences serve as a means to recruit new women, and spread ideas or to share ideas with people of like commitment. For bigger cities it may be different, but for our area conferences are expensive and transportation and housing should be provided. In order to keep vital energy in conferences goals and purposes should be examined. Often if the topic is specific like women and work the analysis and ideas which come out of the conference can't go beyond those of a service group.

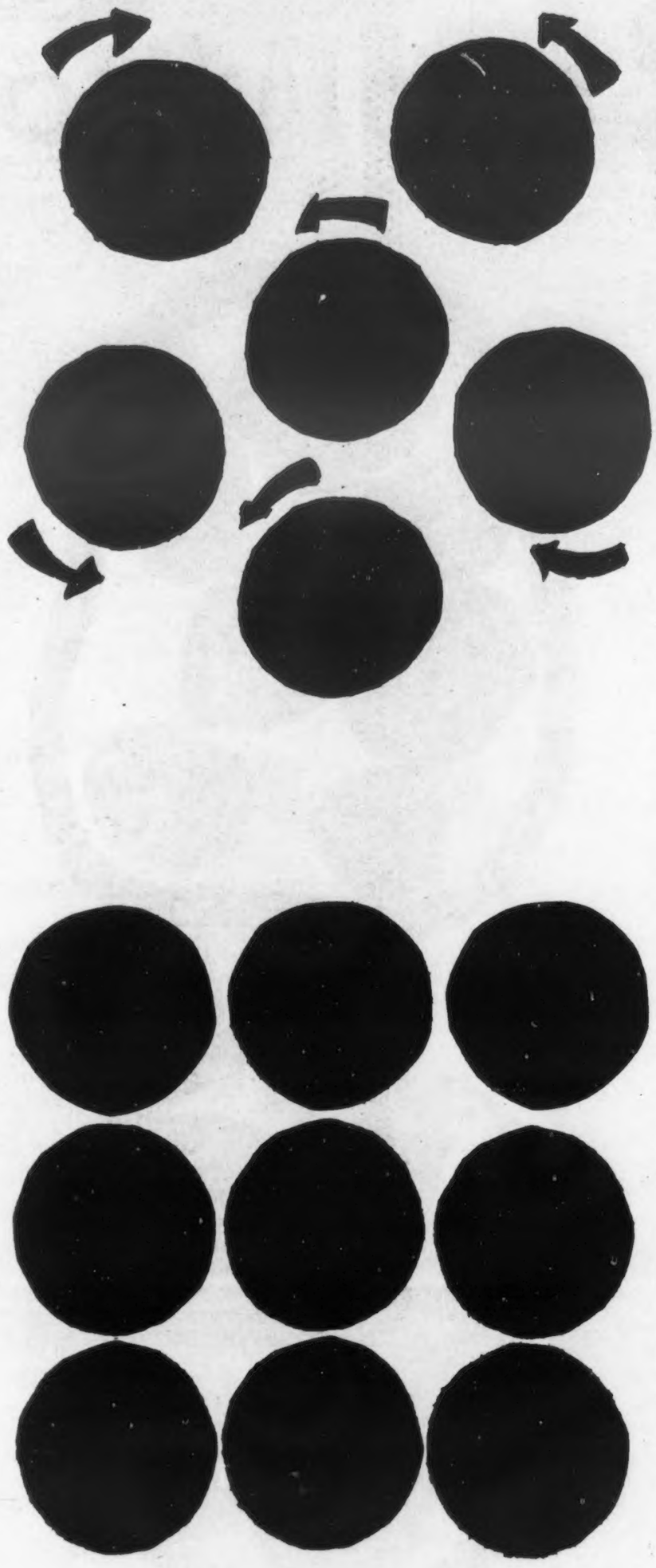
The nature of conferences has changed in the past few years from dealing with philosophical/ideological issues to organizing specific groups, spreading information about ways to fight within the system, and generally meeting the needs of women who have to exist in the capitalist society. Although holding a conference has become somewhat the status quo, the structure itself can continue to be useful as long as the practical goals of the conferences allign with established needs of women. Although the structure has little revolutionary potential, some political education might be accomplished within it.

We believe that organizational structures, although often indicative of the politics and purpose of a group, are basically second to the group's purpose and only important in terms of whether they aid or don't aid the group in accomplishing their goals. Our concern for the equal treatment and wellbeing of the members of any group is a factor we weigh always against what we are trying to accomplish.

What matters is the purpose of the group, the goals it has, its political analysis. The organizational form we choose should be a tool to accomplishing our purpose and because we see many different purposes within any revolutionary movement (even one with a rigid and disciplined analysis which WL doesn't have at this time). We see the need for different forms of organization for different purposes, different times, different areas.

Much of the talk centering around organizational structure comes from a lack of direction and clearness of purpose more than it comes from actual flaws in the structure. Their have been times in all of our experience when we have been unclear of our goals, didn't know what we should be doing politically, lacked a direction. Instead of dealing with that problem (with the frustration of not seeing immediate change, with doubts about our effectiveness) we devised new structures, new rules.

We think it has taken many of us a long time to realize that our complaints against the American political system are not based on the fact that its organization is bad, that the system doesn't work, but are instead based on our belief in the wrongness of its purpose--that imperialism, that capitalism are wrong whether they work or not.



The liberalism of thinking things just "don't work right" leads people to work at endless patch work rules and ammendments and structures and organizations on top of organizations. The purpose of the system still remains the same but the bureaucracy that develops makes it even more difficult to find out what's really going on.

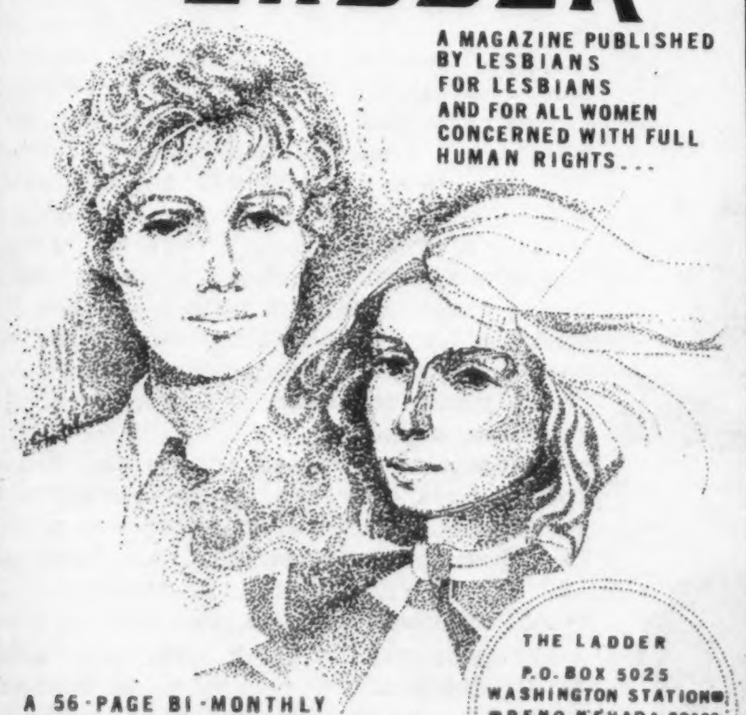
When things are really bureaucratic the form starts to dominate and you can lose track of your purpose easily following the correct channels of action, doing things the way they're normally done. The subject of bureaucracy seems like an outdated issue but we see it as important to think about in terms of the women's movement since it's so widespread now and older and has already established informally some standard ways to do things. Also, it is something to think about in terms of the kind of society we want to fight for. In this regard small groups and collectives work well and when women first got into such groups we did so to avoid the bureaucracy and/or intimidation that we found in relating to other organizations.

But many goals that we set for ourselves like recruiting and service to the community could not be accomplished within the small group structure so other forms had to be found. At this point in development there are several standard organizational structures in the women's movement, and we can easily avoid creating structures that can help us, and are the easiest way to accomplish our goals by instead merely fitting ourselves into what are accepted forms--just as we can worry more about the correctness of the form we work in more than the correctness of our purpose and goals.

We can envision many fronts of a revolution or a period leading up to revolution. Some people will have to be doing underground work - will have to be working in closed cells until defeat or victory - but there will still be a need to relate above ground to people, to gain support for active revolution, to explain their actions, and to establish service for people as the established system is attacked and ceases to supply care (medical, food, etc.) to the people. We see people working with a similar ideology and similar goals but in different capacities, different kinds of structures. It is the ideology and goal that seems to be important and determine whether actions and groups aid or interfere with a revolution.

AIAW

THE LADDER



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SOJOURNER TRUTH,
"THE LIBYAN SIBYL."

"That man over there say that a woman needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helped me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me a best place... And ain't I a women? Look at me. Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me... And ain't I a women? I could as much and eat as much as a man when I could get it, and bear the lash as well... And ain't I a woman? I have borned thirteen children and seen them most all sold off into slavery. And when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard... And ain't I a woman?"

Sojurner Truth: Speech before the Woman's Rights Convention at Akron, Ohio in 1851.

Dear Sisters,

I was disappointed to read that the working class women who were with the paper are now gone, reading what they wrote was a great help to me as a lesbian from the working class.

Each time I write I promise to write up my thoughts on class and send them to you, but I haven't been able to do that yet, but I'm still promising, and I hope to try to do that soon.

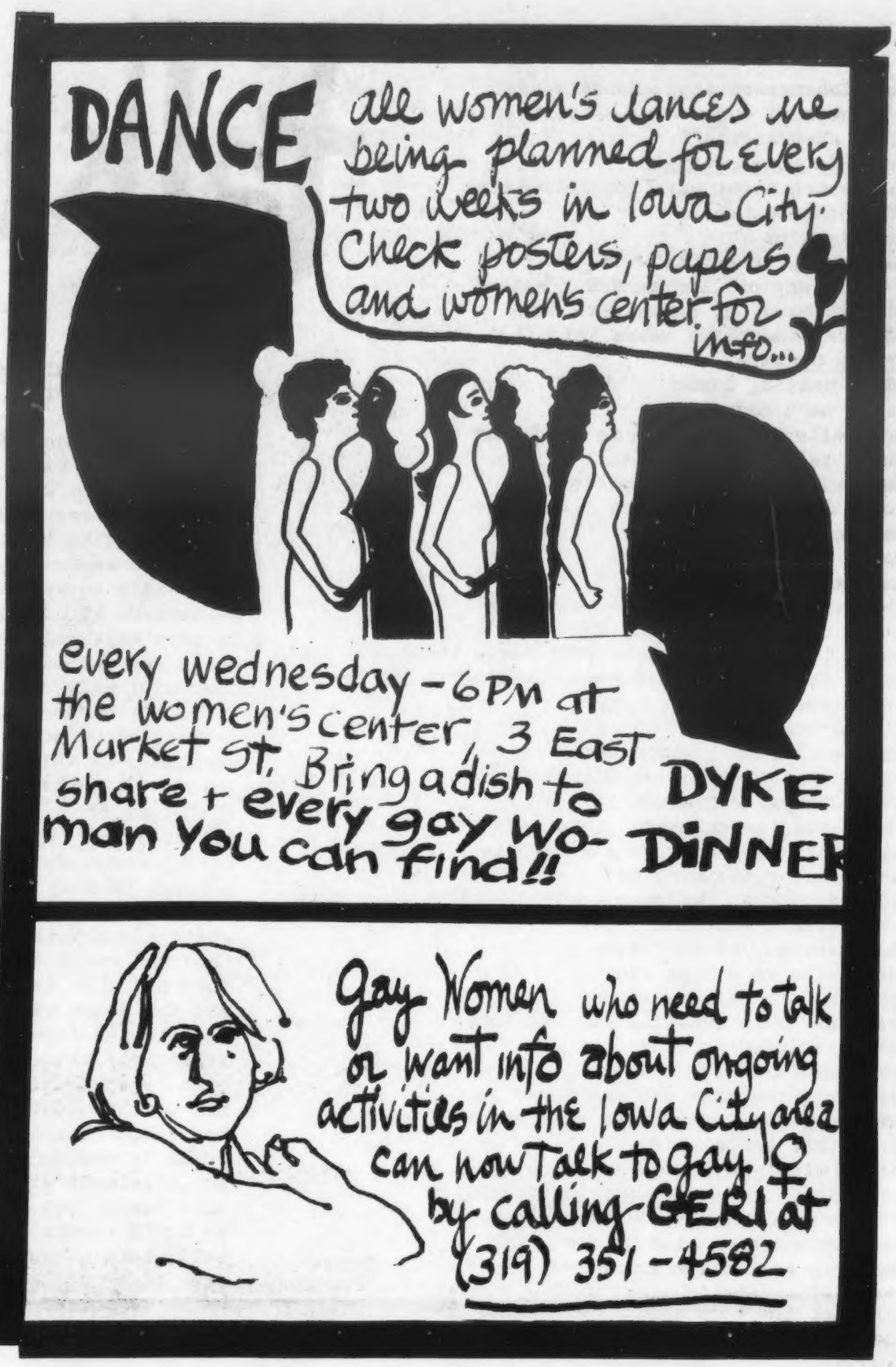
Two things that I have recognised as class indicants in the past two years are bathrooms and grandfathers. One time I went to visit an out of town friend and was overcome by the size of her parents' house, it was larger than I ever imagined people really living in, there were two or three halls on the second floor and I was sure if I allowed myself to wander around that I would get lost. Even though I knew it was very large I had no way of knowing by looking at it just what that meant, and I remembered the system we had when I was younger for telling just how rich someone was, and that was by the number of bathrooms they had. And when I was told eight I was in that state of childlike awe characteristic of someone who experiences a higher class.

An incident similar to that was when someone told me that their grandfather was born in the U.S. I was totally amazed having never known anyone over about 60 who was born in this country. And I guess I just assumed that everyone's grandparents were immigrants.

In both these incidents I felt like a total fool after showing how surprised I was, and as if I had been extremely stupid not to have known that these things were realities for some people.

I thought you might find this interesting. I hope to send you something longer and more in depth someday. Please keep sending and writing.

in sisterhood,


DANCE
all women's dances are being planned for every two weeks in Iowa City. Check posters, papers and women's center for info...
every wednesday - 6PM at the women's center, 3 East Market St. Bring a dish to share + every gay woman you can find!!
DYKE DINNER
Gay Women who need to talk or want info about ongoing activities in the Iowa City area can now talk to gay ♀ by calling GERI at (319) 351-4582

Sisters,

Just received the issue of AIAW you sent to us for the Women's Bookstore in Seattle. The discussion of class really got me thinking -- about directions I/we are taking, about my own background.

I've had difficulty defining class. I know there are differences, but they rarely seem to divide in a way I could conceptually define as working class/middle class. The women I live with and I have been talking about our backgrounds and been amazed at how different we are and how misleading it's been to assume that we have similar backgrounds just because we all went to college.

On the otherhand, there are class differences, and some of the ones you talked about I can really realte to. "The level of concern we feel for survival necessities also demarcates our class". And the whole thing of expressing anger vs. putting it into elaborate verbalizations.

Right now I'm the only one in our house working at a permanent job (it's part time). I can't understand how the other women can go on talking about not liking work when I see it as such a necessity. I went to college; my parents paid for it, mostly by lending me money. I've had a lot of opportunities most people wouldn't have for traveling and experimenting with life styles. But I see it all as a sort of temporary gift. (I guess I've always been aware of the tenuousness of material security because though my parents have had it most of their married life, they both came from very poor families.)

I see it as a temporary gift because I think that as a woman my class is determined by my parents until I am "of age" and after that by the class of my husband. But here I am without that husband and not expecting to get stuck to one. I think times are really different now in that; there have never been so many women consciously deciding to stay single indefinitely. So what's my class? In spite of the priviledges of my childhood, I find that to survive economically, independently I have no choice but to work for a living and that means (shudder) typing.

I have a love-hate feeling about typing. Sometimes it makes me feel independent-- I've supported myself for a while doing free-lance stuff. But that's just playing a game with myself, the kind of game where you say "let's see if I can type this paper in half the time" and feel good for "achieving the goal". Such bullshit--but a survival necessity.

I'm going to be late for work if I write any more and I'll never mail this if I don't mail off what I've got here.

MY MOTHER IS TOO TIRED

TO GO OUT TO EAT

WITH THE FAMILY

SHE HAS WORKED ALL HER LIFE

LIKE A DUMB CHILD

WITH LIFELESS EYES

BEYOND REPAIR

FOR TRYING HARD TO PLEASE

AND COMMONLY NOW

WE SPOON DOWN HER MEALS

AND PASS OFF HER MIND

UNTIL WE'RE REMINDED

SHE IS TIRED LIKE A DOG

AND WOULD RATHER

EAT ALONE

AND LISTLESS SMILES

PASTED ON HER FACE

SHE HAS BEEN RIDICULED

P.K. Powell

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talking with Women

consciousnessraising groups where
heterosexual women discuss lesbianism
as an abstraction
<u>isn't it interesting</u>
that women might have complete lives
with other women
<u>just imagine</u>
not having to put up with
a whole way of life we don't want
just to have our sexual/emotional
(social/financial) needs satisfied
<u>try to picture</u>
women helping women
as we have always done
but believing the help is important
women talking with women
believing what we say matters
women friends with women
keeping that friendship
women committed to women
committed to ourselves
The isolated lesbians in the groups
stood up one by one and TOLD
women they were not sure they could trust
women who would always remain strangers
until they heard the words
I am a lesbian
The heterosexual women answered
why are you telling us this
we are here to discuss
our common experience
not your personal problems
why are you dividing us
by bringing up issues
that aren't relevant
to every one of our lives
of course we accept you
there's nothing more to say
you ask us to question our attitudes
what attitiudes
The lesbians said
you were the ones who mentioned it
we thought you wanted to hear about it
The other women said
if we start loving women
we'll have to start worrying about
what women expect from us.
and there won't be any more
neutral arms to weep in
neutral mouths to kiss
neutral hands to hold
neutral smiles to exchange
everything between women will be electric
no place to rest
and we'll end up
playing butch and femme roles
the old society repeated among women
you don't offer
an escape from our lives worth discussing
and if you did
it would only be an individual solution
a secret love
if we came out in this society
we would have to live your lives
whatever they've been
suffer your pain
whatever that is
become you
whoever you are
we know by the way we back away
this isn't what we want
when we call for a revolution
in every bedroom
when we half-jokingly define this as
the highest form of revolution
we're talking about
holding onto the sex and lifestyle
society taught us to want
and using that
in our revolutionary way
to make society make it worthwhile
for us to go on putting up with it
So the isolated lesbian in each group
sat down
some of the other women stopped speaking to her
some looked at her with strange desire
and eventually she went away
she'd gathered a lot of dust
waiting for her sisters to deal with her
it was in the air when she left
and the other women were coughing
and brushing it off their skins and clothes
when some of them found themselves saying
now that we've mentioned it
I realize I've been thinking about it
all my life without knowing it
of course I couldn't speak it
so it couldn't become real
words can lift your hand
bring it down against another woman's hand
not by accident and not in passing
but forever
in a way that must change our lives
in a way we can't talk away
by saying it's over before it's started

any women
can put their lives together
and become lesbians
any women
can put their bodies together
and become lesbians
I love so many women
I wonder if one of them
would admit to loving me
the other women said
don't talk to us about love
we have to be strong and change society
in ways that will work
don't sap our energies with kisses
love will only turn us into objects again
if love could have regenerated us
it would have done so by now
sometimes we think
love isn't as central to life as people say
that idea is
probably just another trap for women
So the women whose gay feelings were revealed
through talking with many women
had to go away and find the few women
who would see it through
they had to go looking for lesbians
They had shed tears struggling to speak
and the women who stayed behind
were busily flicking away the water
from their skin and clothes
when by accident
two of them touched hands
and found themselves saying
maybe it wouldn't harm our humanity
to experiment with it once
as a sexual act
we won't commit ourselves at the start
we'll keep ourselves out of it
then if it works physically
we'll see where it leads
through chance and whatever our moods are
how threatened we feel
we'll hit a balance somewhere
if it hurts
we'll fight each other then see what's left
life is
that kind of clawing and stumbling around
and when you can't stand yourself
there's always the world
like a great mental hospital
to fall back into
and have other people tell you what to do
so they went home together
and were disappointed
they couldn't hate themselves enough
to completely run away from it
they couldn't believe in each other
enough to embrace it

they kept saying
there are problems complica
well I don't know
they kept hanging around th
like some people hang arour
waiting for an answer reass
finally they said
it's not for me
but I think I'll go find so
just to look at
restful to watch them live
that part of my life for me
These ambiguous women
had raged and torn at thems
trying to keep silent
trying to forget
their anguish charged the a
forming pools around the wo
until one of them said
I want to know
who mentioned lesbianism in
it's a divisive topic
that separates women
and keeps them from working
where did all these lesbian
none of <u>us</u> are lesbians
but out there at the edges
I hear women are changing
they say they are changing

Lesbians looking for other
at DOB at the women's cente
at demonstrations
on the streets
at school at work
looking for a face that is
serious in the same way
knowing we look like everyo
ourselves in our heads
am I gay today
or am I a woman picture
in the world of lies
even I hardly know what I a
how much trouble it will ge
a minute from now
I want you to be my friend
come to dinner
we will feed each other
stories of our lives
in the middle of laughing
we become silent
our minds seek the shape of
the room we are in

ms complications
w
g around themselves
hang around others
nswer reassurance
d

go find some lesbians

them live
life for me
women
rn at themselves
ilent

arged the air
ound the women who remained
said

sbianism in the first place
topic
men
rom working on other issues
se lesbians come from
sbians
the edges of our reality
changing
changing into themselves

for other lesbians
en's center

e that is
me way
ike everyone else
heads

icture
ies
w what I am admitting
it will get me into

my friend

other
ves
laughing

e shape of
n

the streets I can't walk
seem to be moving under me I'm back
shouting sisterhood at demonstrations
then going home alone
or with one other woman
I'm back embracing women I loved
our isolation no longer romantic
our closeness opening me
so I can no longer bear the difference
between my apartment and the streets
two women together couldn't make up for
what society took away
I wonder how many women it takes
to begin giving everything back

Gay women used to talk a lot about
their jobs vacations interests
they would avoid talking about
how it felt to be gay
because the way to deal with it was
to avoid it live around it live away from it
distance ourselves from ourselves
when we could not talk about it in public
we rarely talked about it in secret
there was no place for our anger to go
I used to think then that it was enough
to get across a feeling of general goodwill
because there was no hope of
saying anything honest
if I talked about our non-existence
gay women looked at me with disgust
what was I going to risk
was I going to change the world
the gay movement drew together
women who had felt alone with their anger
some of them were those same women
who had talked most convincingly
in bars and at parties
about nothing but their jobs and vacations
some of them had been the first lesbians
in women's liberation
consciousnessraising groups
now they could go back if they wanted to
and talk with the women who had tried
to drive them away

When the gay women's movement started
I didn't understand
why so many women grabbed five friends
out of meetings and dances
went everywhere did everything with them
sat in a tight corner with them
at the next meetings and dances
finally went home stayed home together
were never seen again
I thought the gay women's movement was
going to be like a family or an army
struggling along together
I thought women who worked together
would become naturally close
but I learned women who were close first
had to find ways
to work together later
women arrived and disappeared
I had to figure out fast
who I wanted as friends
and who would have to remain strangers
sometimes I couldn't do it fast enough
I had to hope the women would come back
or some of their other friends
would take a vacation
so many times I tried to talk couldn't
or women walked away
in the middle of sentences
or they gave me a hostile look
and I began repeating formulas
smiling to pacify them
or I must have frightened other women
and they also began
passing off their lives as jokes
so hard coming out of that world
that told us there were no connections
between us

Women loving women
a circle dance
where we give strength back to ourselves
yes yes yes yes
we affirm ourselves shouting stamping
arms waving feet sliding on the floor
this room is our world for now
we take hands with women we don't know
women we may never begin to speak with
women who are our past lovers in disguise
or our mothers sisters grandmothers
neighbors friends
the children we were
when we first thought of loving women
and our other selves
the many women who might have been
women who were gay all our lives
women who came out in tears and fury
these last two years
women who came out and went back in
women watching us test their freedom for them
and women---
just beginning to exist this year---
who came out because it was possible
because other women gave them
the words for their thoughts
words to describe what would happen
and when it happened
words to admit it

because there were women around them
friends close enough to touch
to dance and talk with
a circle of our faces to look into
sisters take my hands
not only for this dance
let the energy we build here
be life to us as we walk their streets
all space is free space
and I want to be gay everywhere

BY FRAN WINANT

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community: a casualty of capitalism

In the old days everyone was truly economically equal. Work was divided only by sex in the religious, communistic settlement that is my home. No wages were paid in return for work. Instead, all needs were met by the community. A form of a merit system existed only to allow credit at general stores for material things that could not be manufactured by local ingenuity.

The formation and purpose of this group in the mid-eighteenth century was to escape religious and political persecution in Germany. The patriarchal group lived communally in several castles until their rights to be isolated and independent from the goven-ent were challenged. With strong threats to their religious morality they emigrated to America to settle in New York. By the mid-nineteenth century the expanding population of New York threatened to crowd the community and distract the younger members with worldly ways, so the move to Iowa was made. After nearly two hundred years of successful communal living, this final move proved not enough to sustain their isolationism within a capitalistic society.

Families were assigned to large, multi-family houses to live. Living quarters were spacious and kept in repair by community work crews. No one needed property insurance because the community repaired or rebuilt uninhabitable buildings.

Thirty to forty people ate together in a community kitchen, a few in each of the several villages. Food was prepared by a womens' kitchen crew in the same building as it was served. Hearty meals and snacks numbered five a day.

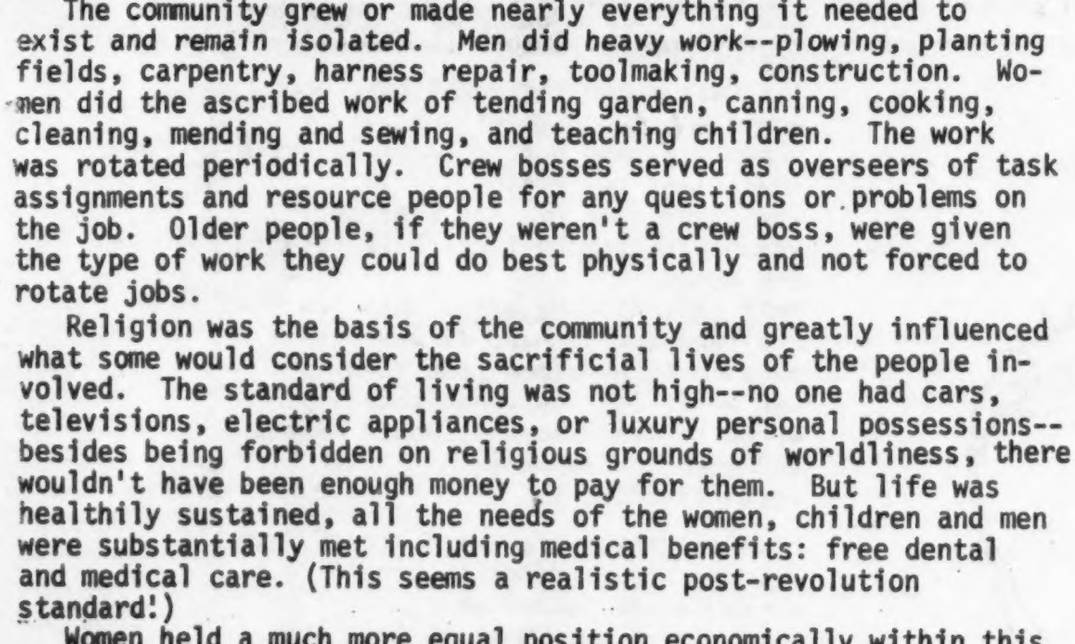
The closest parallel to community elite were church elders, because of their highly respected religious leadership responsibilities. All men, they served as confessors, counselors, decision makers in religious matters, and were generally looked upon as leaders. Women were not expected to be elders.

Children, from one to thirteen, were taught and cared for by women who volunteered for this type of work. Mothers stayed with their children until they were able to walk and help themselves somewhat, then sent them to the school and went back to work themselves. At thirteen, having received all the education they needed in the community, the young adults began working.

The community grew or made nearly everything it needed to exist and remain isolated. Men did heavy work--plowing, planting fields, carpentry, harness repair, toolmaking, construction. Women did the ascribed work of tending garden, canning, cooking, cleaning, mending and sewing, and teaching children. The work was rotated periodically. Crew bosses served as overseers of task assignments and resource people for any questions or problems on the job. Older people, if they weren't a crew boss, were given the type of work they could do best physically and not forced to rotate jobs.

Religion was the basis of the community and greatly influenced what some would consider the sacrificial lives of the people involved. The standard of living was not high--no one had cars, televisions, electric appliances, or luxury personal possessions--besides being forbidden on religious grounds of worldliness, there wouldn't have been enough money to pay for them. But life was healthily sustained, all the needs of the women, children and men were substantially met including medical benefits: free dental and medical care. (This seems a realistic post-revolution standard!)

Women held a much more equal position economically within this structure. Receiving equal benefits for their labor (although work was segregated) made them economically independent. Not having to rely on a man to support her financially because men make better money, as is the case in capitalism, women must have felt a greater autonomy. Marriage was, therefore, not an economic compulsion for all women. Human qualities were emphasized when a couple decided on marriage. This was reinforced by a one year's physical separation of the two, even if it meant moving the male to another village. The theory was that if their interest in each other was serious they would overcome the hassles of seeing each other (a two to five mile walk after a hard day's work) and continue courting.



Punishment was doled out by hand (to children) or conscience (appeal to religious humility of adults.) No outside law enforcement operated within the community. The community, small anyway, remained isolated and as self-sufficient as possible.

In 1932, when my parents were in their thirties, the communal aspect was dissolved because the depression affected the sale of products exported to the outside. Housing, childcare, food, employment were no longer community concerns--people were on their own. Depending on the number of years an individual had served the community, he or she was given shares of the new Society reimbursing her for the work done. These shares helped in the purchase of a house (usually the one resided in).

My parents, along with everyone else in the community, had to begin to take care of themselves and their own families. To my father this meant taking on all the responsibilities of a family man anywhere else--responsibilities he had never known or been socialized to handle. To my mother it meant having her own garden, taking care of her own children by herself, cooking for her own family. Generally, she had to adjust to staying at home to work alone as opposed to working with other women on community projects. For both of them, it meant the American Way of competitive isolationism was beginning--divide and weaken. Economic stratification set in.

Class divisions were soon visible after economic equality ended. My father took a job with the farm department, meaning hard manual labor for $15 a month. Some men procured purely cerebral jobs, for $50 a month. Depending on the size of a family, the monetary resources from all working brought a car to provide transportation to an even higher paying job outside the community. Women mostly stayed home to keep house, or filled the few positions open to women in the one factory in the community, if they had transportation from their own village to the one factory.

Once the initial cultural shock of being thrown into competitiveness with brothers and sisters (figurative) the struggle to get ahead began. The type of job a person got depended on connections more than ability, and the connections providing the better job provided the higher income buying more personal advantages. Traits of honesty, humility and sharing that were socialized into my parents' generation were no longer going to be reinforced. Rewards of position and material wealth went to aggressive individualistic, power-taking people.

The divisions are classist. They have become more entrenced in the once tight community as the people become more competitive in their isolated lives. My father didn't remain a farm laborer, he moved to a factory job, eventually becoming a foreman, while some of my friends' fathers who were favorites of an earlier crew boss became the executives of that factory. Intellectual class differences didn't develop in my parent's generation it seems. Having lived and been socialized in true communism before being thrown into capitalism, they were still too close in spirit to the comraderie and equality once shared. Bonds still held the community together, though within the community material class differences came into existence.

As I grew up our house kept the original slate siding, patched carpeting made during community work parties years earlier, and we utilized the washhouse to do laundry and bathe, while some of my friends' families moved to new houses or interior-decorated their houses, and could afford electric washing machines, dishwashers, and air conditioners.

An income like my father's only supported four adults and three children (my grandparents, my parents, my brother and sister and, later, me) because 1) the adults grew most of the food we ate, 2) the adults were used to and knew how to, and did most of the repair work and maintenance around the house which we shared, and 3) us kids were kept in the "old regime" and set to work around the house when we could help. An income like my friend's father easily supported four adults and two children because 1) he made more than twice as much as my father as an executive in the factory my father worked in, and 2) the adults grew some food. They didn't repair and do maintenance because the electrical gadgets

they had were unfamiliar. Instead of housework, my friend had to take care of her pet dog and pony.

A goal of revolution is envisioned by some as a classless society, with no racism, imperialism, sexism, homosexism, ie. general equality and justice. To have a classless society we must create the structure to support that goal. Communes and collectives have attempted to simulate such a post-revolution atmosphere within the capitalistic democracy of America today. Yet a great amount of de-socializing will be necessary before we can create a true communal atmosphere.

Competitiveness, isolation, defensiveness and classism quickly emerged when the communal aspect of the structure just described was ended and capitalism was adopted. Because these attitudes permeate our present society I conclude they are inherent to capitalism, yet were not displayed to any great extent in the communistic society because attitudes are a result of one's material condition and the material conditions of this community were communistic not capitalistic. Just as changing attitudes without changing the material structure of the society is ineffectual so are small communities setting up post-revolutionary societies within a larger society that's remained materially unchanged.

Racism was not notably displayed. Outsiders associating with community people were limited to peddlers, (I don't know what nationalities), Indians, Gypsies*, and hobos passing through to trade or working for a meal. Chicano, Black and Oriental people were not treated any differently when they came than anyone outside to my knowledge. Yet racist attitudes were picked up unquestioningly when the community changed over to capitalism.

The sexism that existed within the community is obvious. "From each according to ability to each according to need" was the practice, but with the assumption that the ability of women was less than that of men. The concern for justice and equality in this community showed hypocritically through the never-questioned role allocated to women. With the advent of capitalism this role has been rampantly expanded.

There are only two places in capitalism: top and bottom. We individually compete to be on top just as classism, racism, imperialism, and sexism propagate the holding down of one group so another can keep the top position (control, power, affluence). By ending the capitalist structure of society and replacing it with a structure that better meets our demands for true justice and equality, we will likely find ourselves living and working in some type of collectivity -- without the present sexist attitudes toward women, the racist attitudes toward non-whites, the classist attitudes toward poor people. These attitudes that keep us struggling for our own survival and make us fight each other for fear of losing our second-to-last place are the epitome of capitalism, and need to be structured out of the post-revolutionary society.

* We were unsure about the correctness of this word since we don't know whether the name is used by a people to identify themselves or if it is a label given them by others and racist in nature.

by an AIAW member

It's just the way people treat me so I can never forget that I'm younger. Usually, adults see children as totally different from themselves (the fact that there are different words for each group proves this.) I am seen as an age and judged by it. I have to go along with the judgement of adults, since they have more power. Like some adults think: "She's only 14, so she will only be a bother. I know everything she knows, since I'm so much older. I'm not going to get to know her." How could I get to know someone when there's already so much resistance? Adults forget that children (I am forced to use these words, although I don't like to) have a different way of seeing things, which they could learn from. Another thing that adults will do is they think: "I know I'm an age chauvinist. I can learn a lot from kids. She's 14; I'll have to get to know her better." This is a better attitude, but when I'm talking to someone like that I still can't forget that I'm younger than they are, when actually it doesn't make any difference. The problem is like that of many oppressed groups: people have a stereotype of us so we are forced to play roles. Here is an example: children are not expected to be friends of adults, they are expected to be childish. What kind of a word is that? Here is the dictionary definition: 1. befitting a child 2. puerile, silly. What adults do often appears silly to children, too, except we don't have the power to voice our opinions like that. I think you can see the problem. Obviously, the solution is for adults to give up their stereotypes, and see children are equals. I'm sure that's not going to be easy, but it must be done. Children who are used to playing their silliness role will have to stop. I know it can be done, because I have friends who are adults and they treat me like any other friend. I hope they don't consider me the exception to the rule of Children Are Silly, because there are only as many silly children as silly adults. Lots of times what adults see children doing looks silly to them, because they don't understand; they have a totally different culture. Of course you will only like some children; ones with common interests. To me that's obvious, but I'm afraid it won't be to many people. I wrote this so people could see the problem more clearly and thus start solving it. I hope it works.

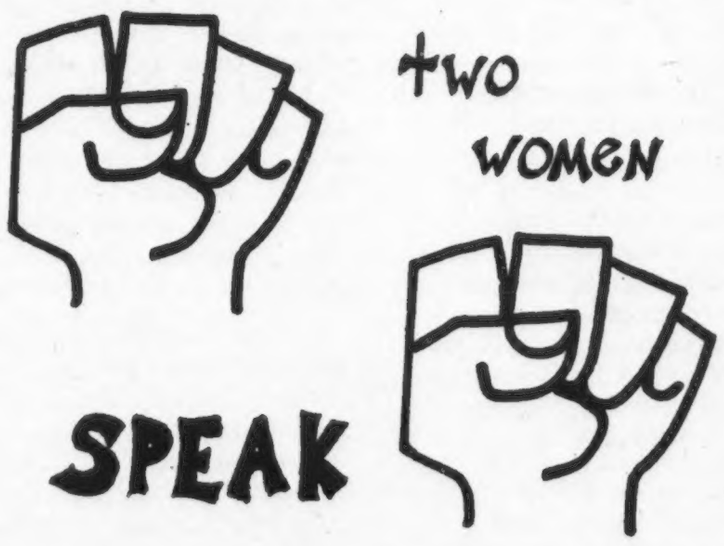
age chauvinism/children's liberation/age chauvinism/children's liberation

High school women are as oppressed on the basis of age as on sex. As I live away from my parents, I'm in a privileged position. I'm allowed to make my own decisions and am considered "mature" by a few adults. This adult approval used to make me feel superior to other high school women.

Then I considered the meaning of "mature." The more powers a woman must fight against, the more oppressed she is. Kids are more oppressed than other individuals because they're UNDER parents and schools as well as other oppressive institutions. Parents and schools control kids' lives and make major decisions for them. It's hard to be an individual if others have this power over you. If a year of living independently helped me to "mature," then it follows that a "mature" person is someone in control of her own life.

Adults pit kids against kids. Kids don't respect each other because they're told that adults are wiser. Children are less powerful than parents and other adult authorities. They are constantly made to feel inferior. Adults tell children that they need adult guidance. After a person is twelve or thirteen, adult control is frequently ridiculous. A parent telling a kid that half of each week-end must be spent with her family wields unjust power. Adults refuse to view children as people who need to lead their own lives.

When I worked at various Iowa City day care centers, few adults bothered to talk to me. I was usually left with the shit work while they sat around and blabbed. Yet if something went wrong I was blamed, because I was young and therefore incompetant and inexperienced. A friend my age was in a slightly better position, being the daughter of a well-known radical male. People occasionally tossed charming grins her way, but she was basically regarded as a peon also. Both of us felt bitter resentment, and huddled by ourselves muttering sarcastic statements about our



elders. We were probably as radical and intelligent as most of the women there, and were more radical than any of the men. Sometimes people talked to us until they found out our ages, at which point they became condescending if they talked to us at all.

Experience comes with age, only because young people are prevented from experiencing. I have been leading an "adult" life for more than a year, yet I am still treated as a child. High school is the supreme farce. I am expected to account for my absences from class with a note from an adult (my own word isn't good enough). Teachers refuse to regard me as a person. After criticizing a teacher's class and suggesting ways to improve it, I was told that my thoughts weren't valid. She would only change her class if a qualified adult made suggestions. So no matter how smart, shrewd, keen-eyed and witty I am, I'm invisible and inaudible until I grow to a magic age and gain some magic qualifications through kissing the asses of a lot of fucked-up teachers. And if I step out of place, they'll beat me back in no time because they have the power to do what they see fit with me.

I sometimes feel that "right on" adults pretend they like me just so they won't be age chauvinists. Typically, they ask me how school is and I desperately ploy for a witty reply. I stammer, my eyes water, I can't look at 'em, and I answer in monosyllabic monotones. Yet despite this gawkish behavior, my guardian is generally informed that they "just really like" me. I find such enthusiasm strange and possibly token. It's just cool and groovy to like a kid. But, my friends: would they invite me to a movie or to dinner WITHOUT ANOTHER ADULT OR SOME OTHER KIDDOS ALONG? Would they want to initiate a close friendship with me? Generally speaking, hell no! They'll shove their politics down my throat (spoon fed) and speak with grace and confidence and ease. I, who am POISED! CONFIDENT! RADICAL! FLUENT! and ARTICULATE! with kids, abruptly become wishy-washy and mealy-mouthed. Ah, strange phenomena!

I'm trying to relate more to "adolescents" again, because I've found that I'm not alone in my paranoid feelings. It was once suggested that I was an age chauvinist, in that I'm paranoid of adults' attitudes toward me. Oh yeah, just like blacks, women, and all those other snivelling groups are paranoid. I figure that even if I am just paranoid, adults still have an obligation to try and put me at ease. I haven't got the confidence that a high school boy might have, and my experience has made my paranoia somewhat justifiable.

Kids should obviously revolt and leave their parents, but unfortunately they have few alternatives. Schools are shit, they can't get jobs, and they don't have any rights. They are regarded more as property than as anything else. Millions of Pinnochios waiting to turn into persons. This Pinnochio sub-culture for children would work well if kids weren't people and didn't want power over their lives as much as adults want power over theirs.

JOAN BIRD

The below excerpt is a section from LOOK FOR ME IN THE WHIRLWIND, The Collective Autobiography of the New York 21 (Black Panther Party members indicted for allegedly "plotting to bomb public places"). The book is made up of short passages from the individuals involved talking about their childhood, their life, their political development and activities. It makes you happy and angry to read it--it did me. Especially stuff by Afeni Shakur who sounds so incredibly tough. It gave me a few things to think about. Like all the people who were in the NY 21 did not have perfectly similar backgrounds--some were not so poor as others, some had aquired a lot of education, some hadn't. It made me real aware of the Black identity that was their unifing force--common experience. I thought about how women as a group (or the working class) have a less binding unity. On a broad base (common needs, oppression based on the same thing) women, gay people, working class people, poor people are each certainly unified but this society works so well to isolate woman from woman, poor from poor, etc., that all these groups have far from what could be called a community. In a way the isolated community that Blacks have been forced into by this racist society has given them a base that they can turn around and use to fight from. In other ways too the tables seem to get turned like the level of toughness needed to survive in a ghetto can give one the tools--the ability-- to fight those responsible for their oppression. It was also really good for me to think about blacks ripping off each other (which several of the 21 talk about) in terms of the working class from which I come. It is so common and such a sign of powerlessness but it happens that it is easier to rip each other off in numerous ways than to attack the ruling class. Anyway the book is worth reading. LOVE AND STRENGTH TO THE NEW YORK 21. *AIAW*

Joan Bird: In February, 1971, I was thrown into the Women's House of Detention here in New York City again, at 10 Greenwich Avenue, in the middle of Greenwich Village, because two people had not appeared that day in court. I had been there two times before, once for a year and a half. The outer layers of this grotesque building are reddish-brown brick. Inside the prison, the walls are made of stone and the bars of steel and brass.

On April 2, 1971, after we had been in pig D.A. Hogan's office all afternoon and also in court, it was very late, and Sister Afeni and the two other sisters who had been arrested at that time had been asking me about the Women's House of Detention and how I had found it, because I had been there. And I was telling them that although they were very hungry and very tired, they need not have the thought in their minds that they would be able to get a decent meal or be able to rest their heads down and relax for one moment, because it was impossible. And I was telling them that conditions were so horrendous and terrible that the hideousness of it would make you vomit. And I was telling them about the rats that run around at night. I was also telling them that when I had been there before, I did not receive any type of medical attention whatsoever for the beatings. And all these things they found out for themselves. And Afeni and I saw them clearly as all being directly a part of the jail experience.

The sisters in there are actually very beautiful. Because they are all from the colony and they know about how rough it is and how hard it is to survive. And they know how to use different methods to get around and survive. When you are in there you learn to do some time, you learn that you can't actually control what is happening out there in the street. So you have to deal with what you are confronted with, and that is basically the Women's House of Detention. So that's the complication that we have to deal with. The sisters in there have come in and out of the House for years now. We found them to be very beautiful. I mean, there wasn't a time that we would actually have to want or need anything in terms of knowing how to jail--as far as linens or blankets or pillows or anything of that sort was concerned--because we always had a connection somewhere. You see, we always knew that they would do the same for us, and we would also do the same for them. There are both "detention women" and "sentenced women" there. The ages run from sixteen on up, to maybe 65.

Upon entrance the women are taken to a section in the prison called the receiving room, which is located on the main floor. We are told to sit down on long, hard wooden benches on one side of the room, at which time you sit or sleep for hours until a guard--called "female officer"--is available to process you. First you are stripped of all your possessions--jewelry, money, watch, cigarettes, wig, pocketbook, etc. If a sister happens to be an addict who is sick and is asking for medical attention, she is told to shut up or is totally ignored. The prison's outstanding character is complete disregard for humanity, human life. There's a big sign in the receiving area: "You can write Legal Aid for a lawyer after you've been here two weeks."

The next act of degradation and humiliation comes as the women are told that we must take a shower. For those sisters who are addicts and are sick with chills and sweats, this is the perfect opportunity for them to die of pneumonia. After this shower we are given a dingy cloth robe to wrap around our bodies and a pair of rubber shower slippers to put on our feet. We are sent to the back of the receiving room to once again sit and wait. Then the prison doctor comes in to search our bodies, internally and externally. This part of the processing is a standard rule of the prison. Those who refuse to be "finger searched" are then placed in a locked cell until they change their minds. The prison doctor goes along with the entire prison program in that he comes along when he wants to do searching, disregarding the bare fact that the women have been up for hours (up to ten hours) going through the prison authorities' "procedures," and are tired and hungry and want most of all to sleep. The women are called into a dim and dirty office one by one and are told to lie down on an examining table with their legs spread wide apart, at which point the doctor jams his rubber-gloved index finger up the vaginal and rectal areas of the body. The authorities' attempted justification is that someone <u>might</u> be smuggling in drugs, weapons, chewing gum, cigarettes to take into population. Now the women are assigned to cells according to the alleged charge you are arrested for. Depending on what time of the day you are brought in, you might be fed possibly a slice of bologna on stale white bread and a cup of water or watery coffee or tea.

Onto the elevator and onto your respective floor, and then to a cold, stone-wall cell not big enough to hold a hyena. Now you are double-locked in a cell until the following day when you are again taken to the receiving room to undergo further physical pain and mental torture of more alleged "medical" examination. The women's height and weight are taken, rectal temperature and blood pressure are taken, and a series of unrelated questions are asked. For instance: "Are you a virgin?" "When is the last time you have had sexual intercourse?"

In the chaos of women sitting on benches and lying on the cold concrete floor--since there are never enough seats--each one is rushed into the doctor's office to face further maltreatment. Sisters are told to lie down on the examining table again and spread their legs wide apart so that this "healer of the sick" can jam a surgical clamp up into the vagina, whether the person is a virgin or not, frequently causing hemorrhaging and severe damage to internal female organs. The reason given for this morbid procedure is that a Pap smear must be taken of every woman who enters the building. The entire ordeal is suffered by all women who are arrested.

Up on the floors where the girls exist from day to day is found a world of maximum security in terms of its relationship to existence in the streets. On the street, which is a larger area, there are police precincts to patrol our communities; in prison there are two female guards assigned to each sixty or eighty women, patrolling every tier and corridor with keys which madly jingle, which communicate the thought imbedded in mind that only the guards can turn the key to unlock the gates.

The fourth floor is specified for women who come in on drug busts, women who are kicking drugs--at which time you can hear cries of pain which are in vain for there is no help given to those in need. Women vomit, urinate, and kick in a cold cell all alone; also, the fourth floor is set aside for "diagnostic" cases, women whom the authorities claim cannot cope with jailhouse living and are classified as crazy--when actually any woman has a right to fuss and raise hell under the existing, deplorable conditions. And last the fourth floor is also used as a disciplinary area, Corridor 4A, which blocks off from the rest of the corridor 4B, 4C,4D. Women who talk after lights are out, who talk back to the guards in defense of true human rights are thrown into A as punishment for "offenses" against the established prison "rules and regulations." These "punishment" and "psychiatric" cells are without beds, mattresses, or toilets. They had wash basins and water. There is no hot water in the punishment cells, but there is hot water in the psychiatric cells. Women live in these cells for months. They have to ask the officers when they need to go to the bathroom.

The fifth floor is specified for drug addicts, robbers, and women who have been in jail before. Both adolescents and adults are on this floor.

The sixth floor is a placement floor for what the authorities call "first offenders" and women with very serious crimes who are classified as "extremely dangerous." An example: homicide, conspiracy, and of all things, prostitution.

The seventh floor is used basically the same as the fifth floor.

Floors eight, nine, and ten are used for sentenced women who are doing up to a year. Eight is also used for detention women who are working, as a means of utilizing the time and the days and the months away until their court date. The eleventh floor is the hospital area and clinic area, which appear more as a morgue than an area to heal the sick. The atmosphere is not one which is exactly conducive to recovering and getting well. The twelfth floor is called the roof. Here there is an arts and crafts room where women can draw, two rooms where women can play cards and listen to

records for an hour. Also on the twelfth floor there is a beauty parlor, which you only have access to after you have been in jail for two weeks.

Two floors that I must mention are the second and third floors. On the second floor there is a library which contains books that are irrelevant to our current-day situation. All books which relate to law and constitutional rights of human beings, and they are few in number, are kept locked up and are not to be taken out of the library. Afeni and I were without any type of literature over a period of nine or ten months. Only after major efforts by the attorneys and constant pressuring and going to different courts did they finally give us permission even to receive our legal papers, our writs of habeas corpus, or whatever legal matters that had to be attended to or that we should know about. So after nine or ten months, we were only able to get that little bit of information. But information about the Party, or the Party newspaper, or movement leaflets or such things, we were not permitted to receive.

Also on the second floor is an alleged learning school for the adolescents--which is actually a game which the adolescents play to get whatever candy, cigarettes, pencils, pens they can con out of the teacher. Also there is a chapel on the second floor, where on Sunday the women come from different floors to see one another and talk to their friends. Also on two is a priest and a nun who offer you the forgiveness of the Lord and offer the advice, "Sinner, repent, or to hell you will go," when actually you are living in hell--jail--called the Women's House of Detention. Basically, like the people who are in there have been through oppression all their lives so it's nothing new to them. But coming in and out of there can be a thing for some.

Then there is the diagnostic area, which a lot of sisters are in, where a quack doctor fills you up with thorazine and chloral-hydrate to keep you from shouting out how awful and horrible the place actually is, they just drug you up. Many women walk around like zombies from these drugs called medication. They just walk around all day in a daze and not relate to anything except being high.

On the third floor we find a slave work area, where women slave in the laundry and sewing room all day and receive no wages for their labor. Recently, after mass protest from the inmates, some of the sentenced women are receiving 10¢ an hour. The scale of payment now goes from 3¢ for janitor work to 10¢ for cooking. The maximum a woman is allowed to earn in jail is $120 in a year. You can't take it out with you or save it up, you're not allowed to, you have to spend it at the commissary. Detention women who are working receive nothing. As the authorities put it, "It's a privilege to be a detention and allowed to work the time away." Detention women are the ones the courts haven't declared guilty. They're there because they don't have enough money for bail. Most of the sisters in jail are detention women.

Also on the third floor is the commissary area where women can buy the following items: wool, grease, powder, paper, soap, candy sugar (50 cents a box), milk, non-filtered cigarettes, cookies, crackers, cupcakes, and doughnuts. Three times a week detention women are permitted to go to the commissary, spending three dollars on the first two days and four dollars on the last day. Sentenced women are permitted to go to commissary once a week, spending nothing exceeding ten dollars. The problem is, most women do not have money to spend on the items since the prices are exploitative--that is, sky-high! Some women receive one dollar from a voluntary group of women called the Friendly Visitors, who in turn take all the wool goods made by the women and profit off of them while the women receive nothing but three cigarettes wrapped in foil, deodorant, and candy--and this they expect you to be thankful for.

The day-to-day living is a rigid program set up by the prison authorities. At 6:30 a.m. the female guards switch on all the lights on the floors and open up the cell gates for the women to take a shower. The shower room is a dirty cubicle consisting of two showers and a wet concrete floor. In the shower room can be found rat holes, dead rats, dirty sanitary napkins, and roaches, yet the shower room is supposed to be used for women to keep themselves clean and healthy in terms of good physical hygiene. Breakfast is served at 6:45 a.m. to 7:15 a.m. which means each corridor of women, usually consisting of thirty totally, has fifteen minutes to shower. This procedure makes it impossible for all women to clean their bodies.

Breakfast consists of the most unhealthy and nonnutritious artificial food available, since 37 cents a day is spent on each inmate for meals. For breakfast the women are served a limited variety of foods, specifically: powdered milk, coffee, hard stale bread, dry cereal or oatmeal, one slab of margarine. Lunch, like all meals, consists of starch and powdered products. Powdered eggs, rice, potatoes are fixed into a sundry amount of concoctions and a base for pork, pork fat, and grease. Only on rare occasions--for example, Christmas or Thanksgiving--is fresh fruit available for the women. Specifically, each sister receives one orange! (That is the vitamin C for the year.) Dinner is basically the same composition of food except once every two or three weeks the women are fed one chicken part of bologna, or "mystery balls" (the name given to jailhouse hamburger meat by the women prisoners). The meat is a definite mystery as to the bad-tasting components authorities call "good healthy meat."

The daily curriculum of activities for the women consists of cleaning out the cells, playing cards, or watching TV from 9:30 am until 10:45 am. Then all women are locked into their cells for an afternoon-lunchtime count of the entire population. Lock-ins are forty-five minutes long. After the lunch count, the women are let out (like animals from cages) to eat. After eating, recreation begins at 1:00 p.m., at which time the activities are card playing and TV on the floors, or going up to the roof area to listen to records, until 3:00 pm. At 3:00 pm all women are again locked into their cells for another count until 4:45 pm. Then at 4:45 pm the gates are opened for the women to eat supper. After supper the women have recreation for thirty minutes, during which time detention women are called to go on their visits--for those who have visitors. The visits last thirty minutes (included in recreation time). Visits for detention women are on the main floor in a closed area with booths and a phone, through which each woman communicates with her visitor. Seeing your visitor is complicated and uncomfortable, because persons view each other through a glass window (approximately 12 by 18 inches). Before and after seeing any visitor, sisters are searched externally, then made to squat and jump up and down squatting so that anything that may be hidden in the vagina will fall out. This happens before and after visits to court too. When you're taken to court and back again policewomen are with you all the time. Sentenced women receive their visits on Saturday and Sunday only, and detention women Monday through Friday, holidays not included. Money orders may be left for the women, which they sometimes never get. Clothes (skirts, socks, underwear, etc.) can also be left for detention women only. For sentenced women the state supplies cloth to make dresses, and sneakers, underwear, socks, and loafers for them to wear.

They say that now they're closing the Women's House of Detention on Greenwich Avenue and they're going to have it in a new building. But don't you see it really isn't going to change things, it's not the building, it's the people, the cruel and corrupt people who can treat other human beings in a way they would never in the world think of treating their dogs.

This is actually the way or form of rehabilitation the system is offering. These conditions we do not need,want, or desire. Therefore we as human beings must move to eliminate all elements in society that are contrary to existence of freedom and humanity.

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